

How Ontario Elementary School Principals Negotiate Their Varied Work Roles

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Abstract

This qualitative study addresses the question of how Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles, through interviews with and observations of 6 principals. Using inductive data analysis, principals' negotiations were divided into 5 categories: negotiating priorities, negotiating the process, negotiating constraints, negotiating the roles of others, and negotiating the self. These principals worked within these categories simultaneously, emphasizing some more than others, dependent on the circumstances. For these principals, the time they spent with people in the school and the resulting relationships that enabled them to build were a first priority, and a large part of how each principal chose to negotiate the demands of their role arose from their personality and their personal values.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This study examines how contemporary Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles. Since 1996, the Ontario school system has undergone a number of radical changes involving shifts in philosophies, climate, and practices. The work of the elementary school principal has been changed as a result of this restructuring. As one example, principals, who previously remained teachers after their move into administrative roles, are now excluded from teachers' unions. This exclusion serves to further magnify the differences between classroom teachers and administrators.

Williams (2001) surveyed 947 individuals employed as principals or vice-principals in Ontario public school boards. One component of his questionnaire asked participants to rank 22 factors that made the principalship dissatisfying to them. The top 5 factors for elementary school administrators were all related to implementing mandatory changes with limited resources and inadequate time (p. 67). In spite of this dissatisfaction, principals are required to prioritize tasks and make daily value judgements regarding the importance of certain issues and groups of people. How the role will evolve in the future depends in part on the decisions individuals make in allocating time and resources available. In this time of change and uncertainty, there is a need to investigate how principals experience their work on a daily basis and how they negotiate the complex and competing demands of the roles they are required to fulfill.

Problem Situation

According to Castle, Mitchell, and Gupta (2002), "since the work of the principal is complex, contextually influenced, dynamic, and relational, no one set of practices and principles can hold for a long time" (p. 25). In light of all of the restructuring in the

education system in Ontario, the work of the principal is necessarily changing, and at a rapid pace. This is at a time when over 80% of principals in Ontario school boards plan to have retired by the end of 2009 (Williams, 2001) and a serious principal shortage has been predicted (McIntyre, 1999). The current situation begs the question of where the next generation of principals will come from, what skills they will need to bring to the position, and how they will learn to fulfill the role when the majority of administrators lack experience. The answer is dependent on finding out what the work really entails, not just in a theoretical but also in a practical sense; not what principals would like to do in an ideal situation but what work they actually do to lead the school and how they do it. Is educational administration still an appealing career choice for those who enjoy teaching, or are the two becoming completely different fields of work? This study is situated within these unanswered questions, the answers to which are personally meaningful as I consider possible directions for the future of my career in education.

Purpose

The question driving this study is how contemporary Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles. The concept of negotiation must be recognized as a key element of the process, as every day principals must decide between more than one important task needing attention. Negotiation implies, correctly, that principals are rarely locked into one direction; rather there is autonomy to manage the tasks a principal is responsible for on a given day. How do some principals negotiate these tensions for personal and professional success?

Through the emergent research design of this study, I have found five areas within which principals work to deal with the varied and changing demands of their work: They

must negotiate priorities, negotiate the process, negotiate constraints, negotiate the roles of others, and negotiate the self. These categories are not listed in order of importance or chronology, as principals must be able to manage multiple categories at once and must shift back and forth between areas. Each area of negotiation requires that principals draw on a different base of knowledge and use a different set of skills. This necessitates a constant changing of focus and rebalancing of priorities. What is required of principals to successfully negotiate the competing demands of these varied roles? Specifically, the study addressed the following questions:

1. How do contemporary principals negotiate priorities within their schools?
2. How do contemporary principals manage the process of negotiation within their schools?
3. How do contemporary principals negotiate constraints within their schools?
4. How do contemporary principals negotiate the roles of others within their schools?
5. How do contemporary principals incorporate the negotiation of the self within their schools?

Through this study, I hope to bring some insights into these issues as they affect the daily work of some elementary school principals.

Rationale

This study has significance in more than one area. While the specific methodologies will not allow for generalization to the greater population of principals, the experiences of the participants in this study can give readers some insight into the

evolving nature of a principal's work. Those working within the role can use this insight to make changes in the way they fulfill the principal's roles. Those wishing to enter into a principalship may see within this study reasons to continue along that path, or they may identify conditions they wish to see changed before making that shift. In terms of policy-making, any impetus to future change in the work the principal is required to do needs to be directed by educational research, and this study can serve to inform future policy.

The participants in a study of this nature are necessarily affected by their participation since "by virtue of being interviewed, people develop new insights and understandings of their experiences" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 98). Through reflecting on and having to articulate the way they approach their work, principals may be encouraged to change something they find unsatisfactory in their practice or to put additional time and effort into something they recognize as valuable.

I find this study of value to myself, both as a possible principal and as an elementary school teacher. Teachers can benefit through an awareness of what the principal's job entails. Often, classroom teachers see principals' actions in the context of a specific student or classroom, and this study sheds some light on the broader picture of a principal's job. Teachers and administrators must work together, and this relationship will only be strengthened if each one has an understanding of and an appreciation for the demands the other must face in the course of a day.

Chapter Two of this study reviews some of the related literature regarding principals' negotiation of multiple roles and theories of educational leadership in general as it relates to this study. The specific methodology and procedures of this study are described in Chapter Three. In Chapter Four, I present the results of this study as

determined through detailed data analysis, and finally, Chapter Five contains a summary and discussion of the results along with implications for practice and for research.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Authors have written extensively regarding the various roles of principals and how they negotiate their varied work roles. I examine the work of the principal under the five areas of negotiation identified in the first chapter: negotiating priorities, negotiating the process, negotiating constraints, negotiating the roles of others, and negotiating the self. These areas of negotiation are not listed in any order of chronology or priority, since principals are required to operate in multiple areas simultaneously and to shift back and forth among them.

Negotiating Priorities

One of the first things a principal must do is determine priorities among multiple roles. The work of a principal has changed, and according to Fennell (2002), “with the increased complexities of society and the increasing expectations placed on principals by members of the public, their roles are likely to change even more drastically during the 21st century” (p. 14). One of the most critical negotiations is between leadership activities and managerial tasks.

Gardner (1990) argues that it is possible to distinguish between “the general run of managers” (p. 6) and what he calls leader/managers: those who integrate the two roles. According to Gardner, “every time I encounter utterly first-class managers they turn out to have quite a lot of the leader in them” (p. 6). Leaders and leader/managers differ from ordinary managers in that they think longer term; grasp the relationship between their organization and the larger reality; reach and influence constituents beyond their jurisdictions; place a heavy emphasis on vision, values, and motivation; have the political skill to cope with the conflicting requirements of multiple constituencies; and think in

terms of renewal (p. 6). A leader/manager does not perform management tasks in isolation but thinks ahead as to what the impact of each managerial decision will have on the staff, on students, and on learning. Gardner goes on to say that contemporary leaders must institutionalize their leadership so that, when the leader departs, the system is able to survive. It is through managerial tasks such as budgets and allocation of resources, staffing procedures, allocation of time, structures for meetings, and professional development that the vision and goals of the leader or leadership team can be institutionalized to survive into the future.

Another author who advocates for the integration of management with leadership is Marsh (1997). In his discussion of educational leadership for the 21st century, Marsh links management functions and support to educational improvement. One example he uses is that of information systems: "The problem with information systems is not simply to decentralize the information to the local school but also to rethink what information is needed - an educational leadership issue" (p. 133). This indicates that management decisions made in isolation will not necessarily provide the greatest support for the educational goals of the organization. Marsh describes school principals as progressing through three stages in their ability to make these management/leadership connections. According to him, *Stage 3 leaders* understand the whole of educational leadership; they see how functions such as budgeting and personnel have an effect on teaching and learning. The vision of the Stage 3 leader allows for management functions to support the other roles of the leader, "even if the operational details are ultimately delegated to other participants at the school" (p. 136). In order to be effective, management structures must be designed to support the educational improvement initiatives of the school community.

Ontario principals spend a majority of their time on management tasks, according to Castle, et al. (2002). In their study of Ontario elementary school principals, principals indicated that a great deal of time was spent on a variety of management and co-ordination activities. These included:

Recording student absences; arranging timetables and duty rosters; ordering school supplies; balancing resource budgets; co-ordinating legal and safety procedures; scheduling meetings; answering questions; overseeing the flow of information; brokering information delivered to staff and the parent community; and arranging for professional development opportunities. (p. 27)

As one principal stated, “the managerial function - that’s been the biggest change I’ve seen in administration” (p. 27). In their study, the office of the principal was the centre for the co-ordination of the multitude of managerial activities that contributed to the smooth running of the school. The authors concluded that management tasks held predominance in these principals’ worlds.

When Castle, et al. (2002) examined tensions between the roles principals were asked to play, they found that the primary tension lay between management and instructional leadership. The principals in the study found it difficult to strike a balance between the two and had different approaches to resolving this tension. Some held on to management responsibilities and delegated responsibilities for instructional leadership, but others felt that instructional leadership was “the one thing that distinguished them from building managers” (p. 30). In addition, this tension is increasing in Ontario, since a political focus on parental involvement and accountability, budget cuts, and constraints in staffing and other resources only increases the number and complexity of the managerial

tasks to which a principal has to attend. Allowing management tasks to take over principals' time is a grave mistake according to Williams (2001), who recognizes that "clerical staff could do many of the tasks that occupy school administrators' time much more cheaply, efficiently and probably better" (p. 53). More research needs to be done regarding how different principals negotiate this tension, as this deluge of management responsibilities is also a highly ranked source of principals' dissatisfaction according to Williams.

Without a solution to these sources of dissatisfaction, including the tension between instructional leadership and managerial tasks, it will become increasingly difficult to attract teachers to the principalship. In 1998, the Ontario College of Teachers forecast that 63% of principal-qualified teachers would retire by the year 2008, and according to Williams (2001) over 80% of principals in Ontario school boards plan to retire by the end of 2009. With this influx of beginning administrators, how will they manage the negotiation of priorities required to fulfill multiple roles? This negotiation of priorities is critical because Mitchell and Castle (2002) found "that what the principals held to be important would take priority in the school" (p. 17). Therefore, principals are creating a culture not only in their own jobs but also for the staff and students who look to them to determine school direction.

Negotiating the Process

Principals must learn to negotiate the process, and the approach will vary dependent on factors including, but not limited to, the principal's experience and the number of years in a particular school.

Experience changes the way principals fulfill their work roles. MacMillan and

Meyer (2002) undertook a study of administrators of varying levels of experience and concluded that “experience does impact on how principals view their work, on the amount of time they spend doing it and on the priorities that they set” (p. 53). They found that new principals have a clear focus on the school, which then shifts to outside of the school in the middle years of a career, to finally return back to the school again (p. 52). The researchers surmised that new principals, those with 0-5 years experience, are working to improve their administration, with a likely focus on management issues. Those with 6-10 years are working to expand their professional network and experience through participation in professional organizations and outside initiatives, and the third group (11-16 years) is focused on the school and instruction, including staff development (p. 53). The process principals undertake to determine which roles are a priority is a function of where they lie in their own professional and career development.

Complexity is a defining characteristic of a principal’s learning to negotiate the process, and one of the most complex processes is that of beginning in a new school. Even with years of administrative experience, a principal who starts in a new school finds that the process of negotiation must accommodate the new situation. Sarbit (2002), using an analogy to moviemaking, describes the process of succession thus:

When principals change schools, they enter a new moving set with different continuing stories, scripts, and actors. They arrive with unique personal qualities and skills, and with no guarantee that the strategies that worked well for them at one school can be successfully enacted in a different school. (p. 77)

She goes on to review the advice given to principals in the succession literature, determining that:

There is an abundance of advice around for principals who are moving schools, but alas, it seems little consensus: bide your time / seize the day; don't make waves / capitalize on your window of opportunity; be creative / follow the superintendent's lead, and so on Seemingly, the best advice to give principals changing schools is "it depends." (pp. 78-79)

An experienced principal who has developed a personal process to successfully negotiate roles will likely find that a new school requires a completely new approach, at least in the interim.

Complexity was also found to be inherent in a principal's work by Castle et al. (2002). In their study of 12 elementary school principals, they uncovered three key characteristics of a principal's work environment: highly fragmented, need for multitasking, and complex. Complexity was evidenced in the simple, daily tasks, but also "in the number of communiqués, directives, and requests for action arriving from the school board as well as from the Ministry of Education and other agencies such as the College of Teachers" (p. 29). Since the writing of this article, the new Teacher Performance Appraisal model (TPA) could certainly be included in this list of complex external demands upon a principal's time and resources. Castle et al. found additionally that principals experienced significant tension when they were given responsibility for these external tasks without the corresponding authority to control the outcome. A principal who is unable to develop an approach to negotiating these tasks and tensions will not be a successful administrator.

One approach to managing this complexity is suggested by Mitchell and Castle (2002). They find coherence is one of three clues that could bring "a degree of order to

the role of instructional leadership” (p. 14), the other two being balance and structure. Coherence of instructional improvement initiatives can be achieved in different ways and does not require that the principal control all projects within the school. It allows for a distribution of leadership, but with the principal providing the focus for activities to ensure that groups are not working at cross-purposes. In their study, every principal stressed that testing priorities were currently directing their instructional leadership initiatives. While the Ministry of Education, not the principals, was the driving force behind the focus on standardized test competencies (reading, writing, and higher level thinking), principals welcomed the clarity of expectations and the focus that such a project could bring. Situated between the Ministry and the schools, Mitchell and Castle found that coherence of board initiatives related to instructional improvement increased the principals’ ability to achieve coherence within the school. Principals are dissatisfied when they are forced to implement too many changes in too little time (Williams, 2001). Achieving coherence is more likely when schools are able to focus on a smaller number of changes at once and are given sufficient time to plan for and then to implement these changes. This is all part of the negotiation these principals must manage.

Negotiating Constraints

Principals working to negotiate their varied work roles find that often their efforts are constrained by external forces. Mitchell and Castle (2002) confirm that “current trends continue to emphasize managerial, political, and accountability imperatives” (p. 24). Bénard and Vail (2002) surveyed Ontario elementary and secondary principals and vice-principals and asked them to reflect on their decision to become administrators and give other feedback regarding the principalship. Administrators suggested that the

position is no longer as appealing as once envisioned due to factors including “external pressures, stress, increased workload and increased accountability” (p. 18). One suggestion in the literature to try to make the accountability trend more palatable and workable for principals is to shift the focus, where possible, from external accountability to internal accountability.

Newmann et al. (1997), in their study of restructuring schools, found that strong internal accountability in a school “stimulated consensus on a clear purpose for student learning and staff collaboration to achieve that purpose” (p. 58). Internal accountability was found when “essential components of accountability were generated largely within a school staff. Staff identified clear standards for student performance, collected information to inform themselves about their levels of success, and exerted strong peer pressure within the faculty to meet the goals” (p. 48). Schools that had this commitment to a clear purpose exhibited higher organizational capacity than schools where accountability was externally determined and mandated. Inversely, higher organizational capacity in the school contributed to strong internal accountability. As acknowledged by the authors, theoretically both components, accountability and organizational capacity, are required for high performance within a school.

Strong internal accountability, however, does not imply that schools become isolated and unconnected to the community. Newmann et al. (1997) found that schools with strong systems of internal accountability did not make decisions in isolation but were responsive to the external environment in defining standards and in determining the kind of information collected. When a school determines goals and objectives, all stakeholders must be involved to some degree, at the same time recognizing and valuing

the expert knowledge of those who work in the education field. Students, parents, business, and the greater community need a voice in the goals and purposes of the contemporary education system.

Recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education has taken much of the responsibility for setting goals for educational improvement. The double focus on curriculum change and standardized testing has been rapid and with scarce time and resources provided for implementation, resulting in discontent of many teachers and administrators. One response to this is to concede power and autonomy to the external forces and follow all initiatives blindly. Many administrators see this as the only way to manage constraints, but Castle et al. (2002) “observed some principals exercising considerable autonomy in the face of external pressures” (p. 33). According to the authors, “the reality of constraints (the possibilities) are confounded by a principal’s belief about what is possible and by personal desire as to what he or she wants to undertake” (p. 33).

Negotiating the Roles of Others

The human side of any organization is a crucial component to efficiency and effective practice, and any teacher who has worked in a strongly negative school climate will tell you of the serious deleterious effect it has on the morale of all who work there, staff and students. Principals have a responsibility to foster working conditions within which a positive climate can develop.

Mitchell and Castle (2002) found that the principals in their study placed the most emphasis on building an affective climate in their schools, and they did this through building relationships. They saw one of their main tasks to be creating a positive environment in the school, which they felt was a strong component of instructional

leadership. The *learning community* is one label for the type of climate some of these principals were striving to create. Mitchell and Sackney (2000) make it clear that the learning community is not an easy concept to define but that there are certain terms and conditions that a learning community must satisfy. According to Mitchell and Sackney, the ends of the learning community are the growth and development of people, and the means are the ways in which the members of the community work and learn together. The learning community creates meaning and defines its values and beliefs in ongoing dialogues among members of the community, and a shared vision or common goal holds members together. This shared vision or goal can be revised and renegotiated because members are in close contact and communication with each other.

A central feature of building a learning community arises out of Mitchell and Sackney's (2000) model for building capacities in three areas: personal capacity, interpersonal capacity, and organizational capacity. To build personal capacity, which "has to do with active and reflective construction of knowledge" (p. 13), individuals reflect on their personal practice, challenge assumptions, and find areas for growth and new ways of doing things. Interpersonal capacity builds through the relationships and collaborative opportunities that exist between colleagues. "Organizational capacity is concerned with building structures that create and maintain sustainable organizational processes" (p. 14). It is the structures within the system that need to be flexible enough to accommodate and encourage the efforts of individuals and groups searching for new approaches and ways of relating. Consequently, organizational capacity is increased where structures are responsive to individual needs for professional learning while allowing time for collaboration.

These three capacities are not separate, nor do they develop in a specific order.

Mitchell and Sackney (2000) explain that:

At times, circumstances will position one of the categories ahead of the others, and attention will focus on that kind of capacity for a while. At other times, the three capacities will nest within one another, and it will be difficult to tell them apart. (p. 12)

According to this capacity building model, “the development of a learning community comes about through the interplay among personal abilities, interpersonal relationships, and organizational structures” (p. 11). It will be the job of principals in a learning community to recognize which capacity in the school needs building at a particular time and to create opportunities that encourage that growth to occur. The principal who can work with staff to build capacities in these three areas will create a climate that holds learning and growth for everyone as a top priority.

Lambert (1998) also connects capacity building with leadership, describing an effective school as one in which there exists broad-based, skillful participation in leadership. Lambert argues that the role of the principal in building leadership capacity among colleagues consists of establishing collegial relations and breaking dependency relationships. The principal needs to actively work to change the power relations that likely exist in the current environment and restructure the balance of power and authority.

The learning community necessitates a style of leadership that differs greatly from traditional, authoritarian ways of leading. For example, transformational leadership is suited to working within a learning community. Hallinger (1992) calls transformational leadership the role of leaders in the 1990s, allowing the leader to cope with the growing

complexities of the work. Hallinger's point is that transformational leaders lead from the back, allowing goals to be set by the staff and the community. They then work with staff to build capacity for leadership and assist staff to develop unique solutions to problems collectively. The principal also builds capacity by strengthening the network between the school and sources of knowledge in the environment. In 1992, Hallinger concluded that while this is the desired vision for leadership in the future, it is unlikely that many American schools will actually engage in this type of restructuring. In the 12 years since, researchers (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Marsh, 1997) have continued to recommend this type of relationship among principals, teachers, students, and the community. If we believe in this vision of leadership, then it is the responsibility of the research community to create a body of compelling evidence in support of transformational styles of leadership and to disseminate their results to leaders in the field of educational administration.

Negotiating the Self

Often teachers and principals have very specific, and sometimes personal, reasons for choosing careers in education and educational administration. In Bénard and Vail's 2002 study of administrators, they found that "the most significant motivator influencing their pursuit of the principalship was a 'need to make a difference'" (p. 17). This goal is best served by a moral approach to leadership.

Sergiovanni (1992) is one of the main authors advocating a moral component to leadership, or what he has called a servant leadership. This is not the practice of the leader serving the followers but rather of the leader and followers working together in the service of a higher ideal: the values and ideals of importance to the school community. While leaders have a built-in formal authority, this formal authority is rarely sufficient of

itself to foster excellence. According to Sergiovanni, servant or moral leadership consists of purposing (building a center of shared values), empowerment and enablement, and leadership by outrage (using moral purpose to kindle outrage, emotion, and therefore action in others). This framework can give leaders the legitimacy to lead effectively toward common goals.

Housego (1993) also sees moral leadership as a new paradigm for the 1990s. He first argues that educational administration is a moral enterprise, whether leaders choose to acknowledge that fact or not. When leaders make necessary educational decisions, they entail moral judgements regarding what is and is not of value in society. Housego's main thesis is that the societal preoccupation with freedom of choice and equality of opportunity misses important values, including community and social responsibility. His fear is that those in positions of power are choosing to value "*freedom of choice* to the point that the brother values of elitism and competition are in danger of destroying.... the essential value of *fraternity* (community) implying the sister values of cooperation, compassion and compromise" (p. 7). To extend this argument, educational improvement would find a way to teach the importance of these values of community and to increase the incidence of co-operation, compassion, and compromise in schools, not only to increase test scores.

Marshall, Patterson, Rogers, and Steele (1996) studied career assistant principals who did not wish to move up the ladder to greater positions of responsibility because they valued the opportunity that the assistant position gave them to operate from an ethic of care. Three main themes undergird this leadership perspective:

1. creating, maintaining, and enhancing connections;

2. recognizing and responding to contextual realities; and
3. demonstrating concern by responding to needs (pp. 280-287).

These are the same values advocated by Housego (1993). According to Marshall et al., career assistant principals felt that the organizational structures of their schools often prevented them from acting under an ethic of care, and they were therefore required at times to work around or outside of the system. This choice, “to care about their schools and their families ... damaged their chances for upward mobility” (p. 289). It is clear that structural and systemic changes in schools will be required if this moral dimension of leadership is to become a viable option for school leaders. Marshall et al.’s work indicates that leading from a moral or caring base still represents a challenge in contemporary educational systems but that it is a challenge worthy of attention.

Summary

In principals’ negotiation of their varied work roles, one of the keys is finding a balance: between authority and empowerment, between curricular expertise and instructional leadership, between leadership and management, and between self-determination and community involvement. The complexity of the demands on a principal’s time and resources, including accountability imperatives, pull them in too many directions for one person. Successful leaders will capitalize on the skills of those around them to build effective leadership teams, thereby increasing personal, interpersonal, and organizational capacities within the school. They will recognize the value not only of increased test scores but also of increased care and community values. Effective leaders will find a way to prioritize demands on their time and use integration

of roles and delegation of tasks within leadership teams to successfully balance the competing demands of the different roles they are required to play.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter describes the methodology used to investigate how Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles. The choice of a qualitative methodology is explained, as well as the emergent nature of the research design. The specific procedures followed for participant selection, interviews, and observations are described in detail, along with the instrumentation used throughout this process. The method of data analysis in qualitative studies must be clearly defined, and I describe my inductive analysis. Last, the parameters of the study as well as any ethical concerns are addressed.

Research Design

This study addresses the way that contemporary Ontario elementary school principals experience their work. This is a phenomenological study, according to McMillan (2000), in that its purpose is “to describe and interpret the experiences of participants in order to understand the ‘essence’ of the experience *as perceived by the participants*” (p. 269). Similarly, the purpose of this study is not to find the singular truth of what constitutes a principal’s job but rather to investigate how that job is experienced differently by individuals. This has led to realities that, while they are similar in some ways, are different in others. It is through the interpretation of each individual’s experience and the comparison of their experiences that meaning is created. This recognition and valuing of the voice and lived experience of the participant is a key component of phenomenological research.

According to McMillan (2000), seven general characteristics of research approaches fall under the qualitative heading: rich narrative descriptions, natural settings,

direct data collection, process orientation, inductive data analysis, participant perspectives, and emergent research design (p. 251). A qualitative study should have some or all of these characteristics. In this study of elementary school principals, rich, narrative descriptions by the participants are the best way to understand their experience of the work they do. The observations took place during the course of the principals' workday, in their normal work setting. I, as the researcher, collected the data directly from the participants, and I am investigating *how* these principals work on a daily basis, a process-oriented question. The data analysis was inductive, focused on the participants' perspectives, and the design has been emergent, changing in response to considerations as they arose. This study satisfies all of McMillan's characteristics for a qualitative study.

Emergent research design does not imply that the researcher begins the study with no question, plan, or direction. In this study, I planned to interview elementary school principals from an Ontario public school board. The interviews were semistructured in nature, consisting of the same series of questions for each participant but with sufficient flexibility to allow participants to take the questioning in other directions. The interviews were designed to last approximately one hour in length, and actually ran between 45 and 90 minutes. Each interview was followed by one half-day observation of the participants in their work setting and a short follow-up discussion at the end of that observation. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998), the interview is a suitable tool to choose for this study because the research interests are relatively clear and well defined and because there are time constraints on the researcher. They also say, however, that "observation provides a yardstick against which to measure data collected through any other method" (p. 90) and believe that observation yields a greater depth of understanding of participants

and situations than any other method. To accommodate their concern, I chose to combine a short (half-day) observation with the interview. This use of different methods to triangulate data collection enhances the credibility of the study.

Each half-day observation was followed by a brief postobservation discussion to follow up on the events of the day. This allowed me to comment on what I observed as the researcher and allowed the participant to add to or clarify my initial interpretation of the day's events. It also allowed the participant to comment on whether the chosen day was an accurate reflection of the work they do on a daily basis and to explain any "invisible" activities they worked at during the day (paper work, computer work, phone calls).

Another tool for use in data collection is the research log. I used a log from the beginning of the study to track the progress of the research, but more important, to track my thought processes and ongoing, informal data analysis. The log can also alert the researcher to biases or inconsistencies in the collection and analysis process. While they do not call it a research log, Taylor and Bogdan (1998) advise researchers to record their feelings and assumptions throughout a study because "an understanding of your findings requires some understanding of your own perspectives, logic, and assumptions.... Critical self-reflection is essential in this kind of research" (p. 161).

I intended to begin the study with 4 participants (2 men and 2 women), but due to the emergent nature of the research design and the order in which I obtained participants, I interviewed 6 participants for the study. Taylor and Bogdan (1998) argue that "the size of the sample in an interviewing study is something that should be determined toward the end of the research and not at the beginning" (p. 93). The participants should represent a

broad range of perspectives and experiences and the point at which the interviews are finished is “when interviews with additional people yield no genuinely new insights” (p. 93). This is the strategy I followed.

Instrumentation

I began this study with two main pieces of instrumentation, the first being the list of interview questions and the second a guideline for observations. The interview questions were developed to reflect the questions that form the purpose of the study. They were designed in consideration of the semistructured format desired. Questions in this type of interview according to McMillan (2000) are “open-ended yet specific in intent, allowing for individual responses.... reasonably objective, yet [allowing] for probing, follow-up, and clarification” (p. 166). This list of questions can be found in Appendix A. The list was provided to the participants in advance of the interview to allow for greater depth of thought and greater detail of response. It was also intended to help alleviate any tension or nervousness of the participants regarding the nature of the interview and the questions. A limitation to this is that it allows the participants to consider the responses they wish to give and the way they wish to appear, rather than responding with their first thoughts on the question, although in this case, only one participant prepared any form of written notes in advance. The observation component of the study was intended to identify any inconsistencies between professed theory and theory-in-action that may have resulted from giving participants the opportunity to think about or plan their responses. It was also designed to provide access to practices and roles that the participants may not have noted in the interview phase.

A guideline for observation was developed (Appendix B) to support the data

collected through the interview process, using the interview questions. During the actual collection of data, during the observations, I found that there was not enough time to use this guideline. It was a better use of time to take detailed field notes, including time, surroundings, excerpts of conversation, and my own impressions. These interpretations, also called observer's comments, are an important component of the research. Within the qualitative paradigm, the researcher is "an important source of understanding" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 73). The more detail it was possible to include in the field notes, the more accurate a picture of the day I was able to construct when analyzing the data. What may have seemed unimportant or irrelevant at the time sometimes proved otherwise once concepts and themes began to emerge from data analysis.

The intent during observation was to be a complete observer, not directing or participating in the events of the principal's day, yet this goal was not entirely possible. My presence as observer and the awareness of being observed did affect the behavior and actions of the participants. The principals felt that they had a responsibility to inform or entertain me, in spite of my attempts to stay in the background. This was a consideration when analyzing observation data.

Participant Selection

To select participants, I placed the following message using the school board's internal e-mail system.

I am currently working through Brock University on my Master's thesis in Education titled, "How Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles." For this thesis, I am looking for interested principals to volunteer to be participants in a research study. The study will consist of one

interview of approximately one hour in length, one half-day observation in your school, and a brief follow-up discussion after the observation. These meetings will be scheduled at your convenience, between [insert dates]. Participants will be chosen to reflect the diversity of [the board's] Principals (gender, age, experience), so please include these details in your reply. Feel free to use a range for age.

Please reply to me through e-mail or at home (905) 693-9921, if you are interested in participating or have any questions regarding the study. I will respond to all inquiries. Thanks in advance for your interest in this research,
Terri Convey

This was a form of purposive sampling, “select[ing] individuals based on their likelihood to be particularly informative about the topic” (McMillan, 2000, p. 110), as I placed the message in a principals’ conference and asked for only principals to reply. When this resulted in only 2 participants, I then used a snowball method and asked each of the volunteers to recommend other principals who might be interested in participating. This method of sample selection reduced the potential for personal bias that exists in a complete snowball sample and indicated some willingness and interest of participants to share their experiences. When I still had not obtained 4 volunteers, I then proceeded to ask four teachers I know personally if they could ask their principals to participate. This combination of methods resulted in 6 total participants, 3 men and 3 women.

Once I was able to finalize the study participants, I contacted each of them by e-mail to further introduce myself, establish a date, time, and place for the interview, and to provide the informed consent form and the list of interview questions. This was sent to

each participant electronically. At the end of each interview, I established with participants a convenient date for the observation component.

Data Analysis

The data available for analysis included interview transcripts and observation fieldnotes, as well as transcripts of the postobservation follow-up. An inductive process was used to identify common themes or concepts that arose in the data as well as notable differences across data sources or pieces of data that did not fit emerging patterns. It is important to note that data analysis is an ongoing process, according to both McMillan (2000) and Taylor and Bogdan (1998). Informal analysis of data began during data collection and was an ongoing process. Taylor and Bogdan note that qualitative data analysis “is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical process; it is a process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing” (p. 140). They give suggestions to guide researchers in analyzing qualitative data: read and reread your data; keep track of hunches, interpretations, and ideas; look for emerging themes; construct typologies or classification schemes; develop concepts and theoretical propositions; read the literature; develop charts, diagrams, and figures to highlight patterns in the data; and write analytic memos (pp. 142-150).

Once data collection was complete, I continued the process of data analysis by transcribing the interviews and rereading the transcripts until I felt I had a good familiarity with the data. Next, I read each transcript individually and made notes in the margin regarding possible themes or subthemes relating back to the main research question. This allowed me to examine each participant’s experience independent of the others. When each transcript had been analyzed in this way, I then began to compare

between cases to determine which headings were emerging as major themes. This between-case comparison involved making the shift from a descriptive perspective (describing the participants' lived experiences) to an analytic perspective (how do these experiences inform the research question).

When an initial framework of major themes was determined, coding of data began. "In qualitative research, coding is a way of developing and refining interpretations of the data.... involv[ing] bringing together and analyzing all of the data bearing on major themes, ideas, concepts, interpretations, and propositions" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 151). Each major theme arising from the data becomes a coding category, and the number of coding categories used will vary according to "the amount of data you have and the complexity of your analysis" (p. 152). I found five major themes arising from the data: negotiating priorities, negotiating the process, negotiating constraints, negotiating the roles of others, and negotiating the self. Statements and observations from the data were then assigned a symbol in the margin according to which category or categories the piece of data fit under. During this coding process, categories were revised (expanded, narrowed, added, and taken away) until all of the data either fit into relevant categories or was coded as a notable exception. Important cautions I was aware of when coding included making the codes fit the data and not vice versa and coding data according to all relevant categories (p. 152). The data were then cut and pasted into the appropriate categories. This process of coding and sorting was the organizational tool that refined data analysis and led to the findings of the study. The final list of coding categories provides the framework for Chapter Four and the presentation of these findings.

The research log, beginning at the start of the study, was another tool in data

analysis that allowed me to record hunches, ideas, and emerging themes and to track the logical processes that led to the final framework. The research log, separate from the field notes, contained my impressions at the end of each day of research. This included reflections on what occurred, but also thoughts arising from listening to tapes of interviews, during transcribing and reading interview transcripts, and while rereading field notes. It is in this log that unifying themes and categories were created and recreated and questions regarding data that did not seem to fit were recorded. This concrete tracking of thought processes is essential to the credible presentation of findings.

Parameters

This study included only 6 participants, all elementary school principals from one public school board in Ontario. Each participated in one interview 45 to 90 minutes in length and one observation of a half-day, plus a postobservation follow-up discussion. This limited contact with a small number of participants and the selection process itself limit the ability to generalize the findings of this study to any greater population. Recognizing this, the study claims only to highlight the experiences of a select group of individuals and to provide some insight into how they perceive or experience their work on a given day.

In this study, I, as the researcher, conducted all of the interviews and observations as well as performed all of the data analysis. One advantage of this strategy is that it leads to between-case consistency. The disadvantage is that it could allow researcher bias to affect the data collection or interpretation. One protection against this is to be aware as a researcher that the possibility exists and be aware that bias may affect interpretation. Another protection is in recording data by tape recorder and through fieldnotes and the

research log in as great detail as possible. The research log tracks the researcher's thought processes making assumptions, biases, and inconsistencies easier to identify. When rechecking data to confirm findings, the research log provides a map back from the findings to the initial data, allowing the researcher to identify potential wrong turns made along the way or alternate routes that may have been missed. Additionally, participants were given a copy of my interpretations of their data for revision and refinement. This strategy, called member checking, also serves to offset researcher bias. In this study, none of the participants chose to alter their original interview. Last, the qualitative paradigm recognizes that meaning is made through the interactions between researcher and participants, and the fact that the researcher has an effect on the results of the study is neither avoidable nor undesirable.

Ethical Considerations

Each participant voluntarily chose to participate in this study and signed an informed consent form before beginning the first interview. This consent included provisions for withdrawing from the study at any time without penalty, provisions for anonymity of participants and confidentiality of information collected, as well as consent to be tape-recorded. The researcher transcribed all the interviews, and the transcripts were returned to each participant for a member check.

This study was conducted using the Research Ethics guidelines established by the Senate of Brock University. Both the Brock University Research Ethics Board and the Halton District Board of Education's Research Advisory Committee gave approval for this study. Copies of these approvals can be found in Appendix C.

The purpose of this study was to investigate how contemporary Ontario

elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles. Upon conducting an inductive analysis of the experiences of 6 elementary school principals, I was able to find some similarities in the way they negotiated priorities, negotiated the process, negotiated constraints, negotiated the roles of others, and negotiated the self. It is these major themes that serve as the framework for the presentation of results in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the study undertaken to investigate how Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles. Qualitative methodology was used in this study, and the data collected during participant interviews and observations were examined through inductive analysis, which yielded five themes: negotiating priorities, negotiating the process, negotiating constraints, negotiating the roles of others, and negotiating the self. These themes are used to present the results of the study. It should be emphasized that the list does not imply any specific order of importance or chronology, as these principals found themselves having to negotiate on multiple levels simultaneously. The chapter begins with a brief description of the participants including such information as gender, number of years of administrative experience, and number of years in the current school.

The Participants

There were 6 participants in this study, 3 males and 3 females. The first 2 participants were selected through a purposive sample, and the remaining 4 through a snowball technique. All participants were elementary school principals in the same public school board in Ontario.

Alan¹ had 7 years of administrative experience, 3 as principal. It was his first year at this school, where he shared the administrative role with a vice-principal. Paul also had 7 years of administrative experience, 3 as principal. This year, for the first time in his 3 years at the school, he was the single administrator, having lost his vice-principal last year. Brian was the most experienced of the participants, with 17 years, 16 as principal.

¹ To protect the identities of the participants, all names are pseudonyms. In interview transcripts participants are identified as P1, P2, and so forth.

He had been at five different schools as an administrator, and this was his first year at this particular school.

Kim and Annie had been at their schools for 4 and 5 years respectively. Kim had 12 years experience as a principal and Annie 8 years in administration, 5 as principal. Both women shared the administrative role in their schools with a vice-principal. Pam was the newcomer. This was her first year as a principal in a single-administrator school. She had been a vice-principal for 3 years.

In addition, Alan and Kim worked in the same suburban city, Pam and Annie worked in the generally more affluent suburban city next door, and Paul and Brian worked in a more rural setting. In all of the schools, the student population ranged from kindergarten to grade 8, with the exception of Pam's school, which was JK to grade 5. Alan's, Kim's, and Annie's schools had feeder schools for their grade 7 and 8 classes, which resulted in a large intermediate population.

Negotiating Priorities

In their varied work roles, these principals needed to negotiate priorities. Each principal spoke in their interview about needing to do certain tasks before others, and each alluded to a different approach for determining what tasks get done in what order. The data yielded three concepts that shaped their negotiation process: the nature of the priorities, ordering of priorities, and tensions among priorities.

Nature of Priorities

The nature of the principal's priorities within the school was threefold: those directed to the long-term vision, those meeting short-term needs within the school, and those that arose from being immediately available.

One aspect that informed the principals' negotiation process was the extent to which each priority related to the long-term vision they had for their school. When these principals discussed their work, they referred to a long-term vision for the school that they expected would guide efforts in other areas. Alan said, "First, you have an overall guiding principle, that's your mission, and then you work the other things around it.... You really try to plan for what's important and work the other things around it, to various levels of success" (P1, p. 2). While Alan tried to keep his long-term vision first, his comment suggested that he had some difficulty in doing so. Brian clearly specified what his guiding principle or mission was:

You look at the greatest need in terms of what can be done for the students in the school first. The crises as they come up you have to deal with ... then once that's done, it's, "O.K., what can you do to help teachers enhance student learning?" (P3, p. 1)

In terms of negotiating priorities, Brian acknowledged that dealing with crises did interrupt his long-term goal of helping teachers help students. Even when other priorities interfered with the principals' long-term vision, however, the vision served as an anchor to which they could return.

Within the principals' negotiation of priorities, they were required to meet the short-term needs in the school building. These principals referred to these short-term needs as emergencies or fires:

Yes, in this role you have to be able to fight fires ... so, I think the Board hires you because you can go and deal with situations promptly and effectively, because if you can't, you'll never get to any of the other stuff. (P2, p. 3)

On a given day, principals put a priority on accomplishing certain tasks, which then would be pushed aside by unforeseen, short-term needs. Pam expressed some frustration with this. “I’ll tell you what I want to do. I want to get my staffing done. That would be my priority for this week ... but day to day, I don’t know” (P5, p.5).

The nature of these short-term needs was that they could not be left, or as Kim said, “all of those small things that come up become big things if you don’t handle them right away” (Debrief 3, p. 1). The example she used, from the day I was observing her, was not having a supply teacher arrive in the morning. Like other short-term needs, this “is something that has to be dealt with quickly because people obviously are inconvenienced because someone isn’t here, and you saw how many people that affected today” (Debrief 3, p. 1).

The third type of priority was immediate accessibility. More than one of these principals put a priority on being available and accessible to staff, students, parents, and other visitors to the building. When determining where they spent their time in a given day, simply being available was a high priority, even when that interfered with task completion. According to Paul, “I wouldn’t say I allocate time on tasks because I make availability a bit of a priority ... so, other things get done when I’m not engaged with people” (P2, p. 5). Annie linked being available with creating the culture she wanted in her school building. “Because I believe in the whole culture piece of it, I don’t think administrators should have their door shut very much, and I think we should be available to talk to parents and to talk to kids” (P6, p. 5). She also acknowledged that being available is not always easy and referred to availability as one of her strengths, but also a weakness in terms of getting things done (P6, p. 2).

The negotiation process required principals to work within three differently natured sets of priorities, each important to the successful running of a school. This became more difficult when these categories of priority were often in conflict. At this point, the way a principal chose to order priorities became important.

Ordering Priorities

Three of these 6 participants made a point of saying that, within school hours, being available to people came first. As Kim put it, “You can always do paperwork without people, but you can’t ever recapture that time with people. They’re out the door at whatever time, and your chance for that is gone” (P4, p. 4). Pam talked a lot in her interview about the things she does in the school directly with kids.

I get out to classrooms a tremendous amount because I believe it’s more important for me to know what the kids’ names are and know what’s going on and then spend my own time doing a lot of the paperwork. (P5, p. 1)

Both of these women pushed the managerial jobs, which would keep them in their offices, beyond the boundaries of the school day or week in favour of being available.

An obstacle to prioritizing immediate availability was that short-term needs interfered with the ordering of priorities, especially in a single administrator school. Ordering of priorities required planning, and these *fires* could not be anticipated. Kim described the obstacle this way: “We all want to be where we’re working on meaningful things in a reasonable time and not responding to emergencies and fires [but] those need to be responded to or we can’t get our other work done” (P4, p.1). When there were two administrators to share this responsibility, the vice-principal was often put in charge of dealing with short-term needs, of which discipline was probably the most common

example, leaving the principal available within the school. Pam had just finished 3 years as a vice-principal, and from her perspective,

the longer you're a V.P., the more you just think, "I want my own school", because you're doing a lot of the crap stuff and you see what you want to get done, but you can't step over and take over. (P5, p. 8)

The delegation of jobs to the vice-principal was a strategy used by Pam's principal to free time for higher priority jobs, and Pam lamented the fact that she did not have a vice-principal herself to take over some of the less desirable tasks. "Wouldn't it be nice to have two administrators, so that one could actually be in the classrooms and make sure that things were happening and doing the things you want for kids?" (Debrief 5, p. 2). For these principals to keep availability their first priority, they had to work around the interference of short-term needs.

An established school culture helped one principal minimize short-term needs. Alan was in his first year at his current school, and he talked about trying to work the other parts of his day around his long-term vision.

I'm finding it far harder, being new to a school, than I was in the second year at the other school, mainly because all those other things were in place. People knew what the expectations were; the culture had changed to match them. (P1, p. 2)

Within an established school culture, Alan had created structures for students, staff, and parents, designed to minimize short-term needs or fires, thus allowing him to negotiate priorities according to his plan, not in response to external demands. Brian, who had been an administrator in five schools over 17 years, also described how the nature of the school had an effect on the principal's ordering of priorities. "In some schools you have

more time to do that, and in some schools you don't have that much time to focus on instruction in your daily role because you're dealing with potential crisis situations ongoing" (P3, p. 3). A negative school culture was an obstacle to a principal's effective negotiation of the ordering of priorities.

The negotiation process hit an obstacle in the ordering of priorities because the nature of short-term needs was not conducive to being able to plan ahead. While these principals knew that they wanted to be available, they found it a constant struggle. Kim described it as "you notice it inside you. If I've been in my office too long, I realize I haven't been out, and it's not a good feeling" (P4, p. 3). Annie talked about having to be careful, since she had been in her school for so many years, not to get too comfortable and forget to get out the way she did when she was first starting (P6, p. 23). They knew what their priorities were but continued to experience tensions in ordering them appropriately.

Tensions

Managing the ongoing tensions among working toward the long-term vision for the school, staff, and students, accommodating short-term needs, and being immediately accessible in the school building was an important part of negotiating priorities. With all of these competing priorities, many principals found it difficult to even finish any one task. Annie compared her job to her husband's. "My husband would go out of his mind if he couldn't get his to-do list done. I don't even have one. It would be just too frustrating, I think" (P6, p. 6). All of the principals mentioned the uncertainties of their days. Pam, the first-year principal, expressed her frustration by saying, "So, I can't say this is going to be my week. I don't know what's going to happen today, I don't know what's going to

happen this afternoon” (P5, p. 5). This day-to-day uncertainty made it difficult to be available or to implement a long-term vision. Another way the principals described that no day is the same as another was in terms of ebbs and flows. This expression arose repeatedly, and this ebb and flow within the work of the principal represented an ongoing struggle to manage the tensions among the three types of priorities.

A second major tension existed between trying to be an instructional leader, a time-consuming endeavor requiring focus and attention, and the daily fragmented work of a principal. When Annie talked about the ebbs and flows within her building, she lamented the realities of her day-to-day existence and the conflict with how she would like things to be. “If I could just be an instructional leader and not have to deal with staffing issues, or kids being late, or parents seeking your advice, then that would be pretty powerful” (P6, p. 3). This was not the reality of her work, and she knew it. When Alan talked about being an instructional leader, his approach was “the instructional leader part more happens outside of the day than it does during the day” (P1, p. 1). This was another way to negotiate this tension. Brian, the principal with the most experience, talked about blocking out times. “You block out times when you’re not available to others and put in blocks of time where you expect, if everything is going well, that you’ll be in different classrooms, working with groups of students or working with groups of teachers” (P3, p. 2). In my half-day observation of Brian, he did spend time working with a group of students, but only when their teacher was called away to an emergency appointment and he had to cover her class. I did not see an effective resolution to the tension between instructional leadership and the interruptions in a principal’s day.

A third source of tension existed between completing managerial and paperwork

tasks and being available. Again the nature of managerial tasks made them difficult to complete when interrupted, and short-term needs and availability were constant interruptions. Annie made being available her first priority, but still the managerial piece provided tension:

The one process that has put me in the position of having to shut my door and do some *work* has been the TPA [Teacher Performance Appraisal] process.... It's the only thing in 7 years of being an administrator that I have literally said to my secretaries, "I'm closing my door. Please try not to let anyone interrupt me." ...

What's really hard in that process is that I grappled with that, that was really hard for me to shut my door and not be interrupted. (P6, p. 5)

The other tension in prioritizing managerial tasks was that they were often imposed on the principal by an outside agency and did not align with the principal's long-term goals for the school. This was Alan's complaint:

A lot of the requests for managerial stuff come without a rationale, so I put that to the bottom of the list because, unless I can rationalize why I'm going to be spending a lot of time doing it, I can't. There's just too much time. A lot of it gets done either when I come in early in the morning or after the kids are gone. (P1, p.

4)

The common solution to the tension between paperwork and being available was to push the paperwork outside of the school day or the school week.

In the negotiation process, these principals first negotiated their priorities among long-term vision, short-term needs, and immediate availability. Immediate availability was a priority for most, but the nature of short-term needs was an obstacle to being

available. One solution was to create structures within the school that minimized the short-term needs, such as discipline issues, that took time away from other priorities. Other tensions included the uncertainties and interruptions in a principal's typical day, the time needed for effective instructional leadership, and the managerial and paperwork tasks that were part of the job. While these principals did not have solutions to these tensions, many managed by extending the boundaries of the school day to include nights and weekends.

Negotiating the Process

The process of negotiating varied work roles evolved and changed for these principals as they gained years of experience in the role and depending on the number of years a principal had been in a particular school. Regardless of the years they had been at a school, it was impossible to participate in every initiative or activity, so part of the negotiation process required learning to say no and carefully choosing what the principal and the school would take part in.

Role Experience

Having experience as a principal was a major factor in how these principals negotiated their roles. Those who had been principals the longest had greater knowledge of the way the system worked, so tasks took less time to complete. Paul said, "You don't need to focus so much on learning all those processes and who to ask ... and when that learning is past, you just do those things and you have more time for people" (P2, p. 22). The only principal who didn't express some frustration with negotiating the balance between managerial tasks and the rest of his job was Brian, with 16 years as a principal. "They're the day-to-day tasks. I probably find them the easiest things for me to do. I see

things as they're going on, manage them as they come about" (P3, p. 4). He was able to identify what needed to be done quickly and easily as a result of experience. Another way principals referred to this learning curve was professional judgement. When Alan said, "Our professional judgement is what we rely on day in, day out" (P1, p. 15), he was describing the years of knowledge accumulated through experience. Being able to negotiate the process was a learned skill for these principals.

Another attribute that came with experience was confidence. Annie, with 5 years experience as a principal, explained, "you become more confident with what really needs to be done and what doesn't have to be done right away and what you respond to. You get very good at balancing that" (P6, p. 5). She referred to an increased level of confidence repeatedly during her interview. The principals with greater experience talked about taking time to make careful, thoughtful decisions rather than rushing, and being able to acknowledge that they didn't have all of the answers. This was only possible with confidence. The first-year principal, Pam, was the anomaly in the group, the only one who was always rushing. She described it as "racing like a madwoman most of the day" (P5, p. 14). Her learning curve in the first year was so steep that she had not acquired the confidence in the role to slow down or balance what needed to be done. Confidence allowed these principals to negotiate their work roles with increased comfort.

These principals were also able to benefit from the experiences of their colleagues. When asked what advice they had for those new to the principal's role, 3 of the 6 participants advocated creating a network of professional contacts. Alan advised:

Be sure to set up a series of professional contacts that you can rely on 100%, and they have to be peers. You have got to have a safe place to be able to show your

incompetence...and to be able to have a group of people to say, “What the heck?

I’ve got this problem and I don’t know what the hell to do.” (P1, p. 16)

Of the three participants who did not give this advice, Paul referred to his own use of principal mentors, and Brian and Pam were, respectively, the most experienced and least experienced principals. Brian didn’t necessarily need to access the experience of others, and Pam had not yet built that support system. These principals were continuously evaluating and improving their ability to negotiate the process, and colleagues were valuable advisors.

Principal Succession

The way principals negotiated the process was different in the first year in a new school, regardless of the principal’s years of experience. Starting in a new school required becoming acquainted with people and practices and developing structures needed to support the principal’s vision for the school. Brian was in his first year at a school, and his role “is just setting the stage for how we’re going to do business over the next number of years” (P3, p. 10). Dependent upon the approach of the principal, different roles took precedence.

Of the 2 men and 2 women who talked about starting in a new school, their approaches were different based on gender. Alan and Brian both took time to observe and listen without making striking changes initially. Brian described his role “being new to the school was just to listen and get a sense and feel for how people did things” (P3, p. 6). This school was the fifth school for Brian as an administrator. Where Brian talked about listening, Alan talked about watching. “When you start in a new school there are certain things that strike you: the way people are, what people say, what they tell you ...

prior to starting, just watching the way the kids treat each other” (P1, p. 8). One approach to starting in a new school was to listen and watch before embarking upon the process of negotiation.

In contrast, both women described making sweeping changes in their new schools. Pam said that she “came in like a bomb in many ways because this school needed that, and I’ve done it in a positive way” (P5, p. 8). Although she tried to put a positive spin on her entry, Pam was hesitant to ask her staff what they wanted her to stop, start, or continue in her practice. “I’m a little nervous because I don’t want anyone to say stop, so I’m going to wait a little longer” (P5, p. 8). “Initially, they pretty much thought I was Attila the Hun” (P6, p. 15) was the way Annie described the early years at her school. Entering the school with a predetermined agenda for change resulted in some negative reactions from staff and the school community. These principals found starting in a new school to be a particular challenge for the process of role negotiation.

Discretion in Decision-Making

An important part of negotiating the process involved showing discretion in decision-making when choosing what initiatives and activities the principals and the schools would become involved in. Personally, these principals recognized the danger of taking on too much. Kim warned, “you have to be careful not to get too involved in too many of those [system] initiatives, or then we’re not in our building to do all the other good things we need to be working on” (P4, p. 3). Others also expressed the desire to remain in the school building where possible. Even within the building, there was choice regarding what the principal became involved in. According to Pam, “it’s always a choice thing. I could be in this office all day, every day” (P5, p. 4). Annie described explicitly

the rationale behind her choices: “You have to make some choices around what you do, and if you really know what’s important to you, then that’s what you’ll focus your energies on” (P6, p. 23). A principal’s personal decision-making was dependent on previously determined priorities.

The principals also made choices for the staff and the school regarding board initiatives and requests from outside agencies. Annie explained,

Sometimes you can’t do everything; you can’t do everything well, and I don’t believe in trying to do everything. If I can’t do it well, then I’m not going to do it. So I make some choices around what we can do effectively and what we can’t do effectively. (P6, p. 22)

By showing discretion in decision-making, Annie eliminated the need for her staff to make those decisions themselves and set an example for her staff at the same time regarding successful negotiation of work roles. Paul had done the same thing at his school. When he arrived, staff members were working in six different growth committees, and within 2 years, he reduced that number to two (P2, p. 4). Pam was having trouble making those decisions: “It’s just difficult when I have so many things I want to have going on” (P5, p. 9). Her reluctance to exercise discretion in decision-making may have placed the success of her initiatives at risk.

Exercising discretion in decision-making was not possible when the choice to become involved was not the principal’s. Brian recognized that

there are just too many things on a principal’s plate. We’re asked to do things by committee groups in the school, the Board office, the Ministry. They range from Health and Safety to program instruction to behavior management, CAS

involvement, and social agencies. There just seems to be an ongoing flow that comes into the office of things that need to be done and timelines for getting them done that clash with other things that need to be done at the same time that come from somebody else, who doesn't know that somebody else is asking for this too, and somebody else (P3, p. 8)

The principal could not negotiate work roles through discretion in decision-making when that power was removed. Pam described her role as having to ensure that Ministry mandates are implemented, but Brian referred to the “crisis in curriculum with the previous government pushing things on a little quick and really affecting the climate in schools and the morale of schools in a negative way” (P3, p. 8). In this instance, principals were told to participate in a change process that was not positive for their schools in many cases. A strategy to combat this used by 2 principals was to “wait until they ask me twice” (P6, p. 16) to complete some of those mandated tasks. This only postponed the activity, without truly freeing any time for these principals. Externally imposed activity was only one of the constraints within which these principals were required to complete their work.

Negotiating Constraints

While these principals worked to negotiate their work roles, external constraints impeded that process. An increase in the level of accountability required in the system proved a major constraint on time, and the specific needs of the school and community affected what these principals could accomplish in their jobs.

Accountability

Increased accountability within the school system required an enormous amount

of work and time from these principals. Since accountability was a requirement external to the school, the documentation that accompanied it was not something a principal could choose to neglect. Kim described that “what I have seen therefore is the level of accountability has increased, so of course there are certain things that we just must get done in a certain fashion. No questions asked” (P4, p. 5).

One example mentioned by the majority of principals was the new teacher performance appraisal (TPA) process. Alan described TPA as “a huge black hole of time” (P1, p. 1), while Paul went into greater detail:

Where it’s hit us recently, huge administrative task, is the teacher performance appraisal model. I’ve got my binder there. I’ve got a ton of writing to do

Someone figured out there’s 57 pages just to do for one person every year. I mean it’s just nuts, and someone else figured out it was 48 hours of actual work to evaluate one person. It just seems crazy. (P2, p. 23)

Similar political constructs mentioned included school councils, school effectiveness plans, and EQAO. The principals did not question the necessity of completing these tasks; rather they questioned the length of the imposed formats. Paul lamented, “we’re spending far too much time accounting for everything instead of just doing it” (P2, p. 23).

Principals recognized further areas for which they were accountable through the law. As Kim put it, “some decisions have to be made by a single person because in law sometimes we have to make those decisions” (P4, p. 4). Paul referred back to the Education Act, where “ultimately, the principal is responsible for almost everything” (P2, p. 20). An increasingly litigious culture that has begun to permeate the school system requires a higher level of accountability, for which these principals were responsible.

Special Education was the best example these principals gave to illustrate the incursion of the law into the education system. Alan was surprised to discover that the school board has “a full-time lawyer on retainer 24-7 just for special education” (P1, p. 18). Legally, he explained,

People are faster to sue, people are faster to look for fault, people are coming differently prepared than they were for items It's like you're dealing with somebody who's looking to assess your compliance to a legal contract. There's no kid involved, none. (P1, p. 18)

The increase in the amount of paperwork required for special education programs was a direct result of the legal issues that could arise. For Paul,

Special Ed is really the epitome of [accountability], where we're spending millions and millions of dollars in terms of salaries and time to account for things instead of those dollars being spent on EAs, or SERTs, or time with kids. (P2, p. 23)

In special education issues, many of these principals delegated this responsibility to special education teachers. Regardless of the legal responsibilities, the volume of paperwork was too overwhelming for the principals to be involved at every step.

The personal implication of the increase in accountability was that the principals felt a personal responsibility for everything and everyone in the school building. Alan talked about how great a burden this was for him:

You always have this feeling of overall responsibility ... and I always wonder how, when these disasters appear in schools, whether it be elementary or high schools, like a Columbine or a Taber, when these things happen, how do you deal

with that part? (P1, p. 17)

When they talked about managing their work roles through the use of delegation, the principals specifically noted that even though a job was assigned to someone else, the final responsibility lay with the principal. The need for increased accountability in the education system exacted tolls on these principals and constrained their ability to perform the job.

School- and Community-Specific Needs

These principals found that the way they were able to negotiate their work roles was, in part, dependent on the specific needs of the school and the community. Brian was the principal with the most experience in the greatest number of schools, and he described this phenomenon:

Depending on the school that you're in, you find that in some schools it's dealing with situations with students, could be situations with parents, and kind of managing the day. In other schools ... you have the opportunity to be in the classrooms, to observe students working, to observe teachers and look at their program, the strategies that they use in their class, how they instruct, how much students are engaged in what's going on. (P3, p. 1)

Multiple principals mentioned that the level of student discipline required in their school had a significant impact on the way they were able to perform their job.

The number of interactions with parents was another constraint on the principals' time that varied dependent on the school community. In her school, Pam found that the parent piece could be relentless:

Last week, I was in my office probably 80% of the time. It was just a wild parent

week. From Monday morning to Friday afternoon, it was just constant parent flow in, and problems, and dealing with problems, and letters, and the whole week was just parent concerns. (P5, p. 5)

For Paul it was not an issue; “the community piece, not too much of that here either, but then when I talk to my colleagues in [another town], some of them have parents lined up at their door all day” (P2, p. 1). While involved school communities could be beneficial, they required an investment of time on the part of the administrator.

It was notable that Brian repeatedly described his current school as different from others in which he had worked. When asked to clarify why this school was different, he referred to the simple and straightforward community expectations:

I think the expectations are very clear, expectations are realistic. People here, when it comes to what they want from me in the school: to be visible, to be involved, to be caring with their children, and they’re happy with that. As a result their children learn, they like to be here, they’re proud of their school, and they’re respectful of the people who are in the school. (P3, p. 9)

Brian went on to tell of other school communities in which he had worked, where community demands for higher test scores and improved academic achievement resulted in increased pressure on everyone and negatively affected the culture of the school. The principal’s ability to perform the job effectively was either enabled or constrained by the specific needs of the school and the school community.

The commonality among the constraints of accountability and school- and community-specific needs was that the principal could not control these variables. The negotiation of constraints involved principals working within the circumstances to

manage situations. While principals like Pam might have wished for “less of an emphasis on some of those external pressures that aren’t necessarily directly related to the teaching and learning process” (P5, p. 13), they were not in positions to effect that change.

Negotiating the Roles of Others

Given that these principals could not effectively fulfill all of their job responsibilities personally, they were required to use others in the negotiation of their work roles. As Paul put it, “there’s just too much to do, and so if you had more people doing it, the work would spread out” (P2, p. 24). Before they could effectively employ the skills of others, including administrative partners, staff members, students, parents, and school councils, principals had to build relationships. Second, principals built structures to support the work of others and to direct it to desired school goals. Third, principals found modeling and mentoring to be an important aspect of negotiating the roles of others.

Build Relationships

Many of the principals identified building relationships as the first priority when starting in a new school. Paul explained that

the longer I’m in this role, the more I see that everything hinges on relationships.

The decisions you make and things you’re trying to have happen in your school, none of that matters if you don’t approach it in a way that is positive and supportive of people. (P2, p. 3)

The first and easiest way to build relationships with staff was by providing various forms of support. Pam was focused on supporting her staff in a variety of ways. She provided teacher supervision coverage, class coverage, coverage for teachers to sleep in on their

birthdays, release time for projects, food, and teacher rewards and thank yous. Although she asked her staff to make numerous changes in her first year, she used the extra support to compensate for the effort required. Paul and Annie also referred to the importance of providing food in the school as a way to show support for staff and to build goodwill. Kim's method of supporting staff was by "valuing staff for what they do and contribute. Just saying thank you sometimes, ... that was a job well done, or a card, or just a thank you" (P4, p. 8). Supporting teachers was seen as an important way to build relationships and thereby gain teacher support for principal initiatives within the school.

Another way that administrators built relationships with staff was through discussion and dialogue. Paul's school subscribed to a TRIBES philosophy for building relationships among students and staff. Within this social skills program, the first step to building relationships is for people to feel included, and according to Paul, "there is no shortcut to understanding each other except through discussion" (P2, p. 17). Even through a simple morning greeting, Paul was building relationships. "When I ask you how you are in the morning, I really want to know, how are you ... I'm really asking because I really want to know ... so I get into more discussions about how things are really going" (P2, p. 9). Many of the administrators had restructured staff meetings to be focused on professional development rather than business or administrative issues. This was another way of promoting dialogue among staff.

The power dynamics involved in staff/vice-principal/principal relationships necessitated a level of trust in their relationships before principals would use these others to help negotiate their work roles. Some principals felt that they needed to minimize the power differential in order to have authentic, trusting relationships with staff. Pam

wanted to be a leader, “but I’m a leader with everyone else” (P5, p. 13). She continued, “I just want to be approachable and make it a good place for staff and kids, nonthreatening” (P5, p. 13). Annie said that she had a hard time remembering that she was the principal sometimes; “you forget that you’re their boss” (P6, p. 5). The principals were keenly aware, however, that when they gave jobs to staff members, the principals were still responsible for the outcome. As Alan described,

You’ve really got to trust people and hope that you’ve made the right judgement in trusting the right people with the right things. Sometimes people let you down and it hurts, but you’re still responsible for that in the end. (P1, p. 17)

In discussion around instructional leadership and her role, Annie explained, “my key to unlocking the secret is creating an environment where people feel they can do stuff and that they’re trusted, and if they do make a mistake, it’s not a big deal” (P6, p. 9).

Principals felt the need to be trusted by staff in order to gain compliance around school initiatives, and they needed, conversely, to trust staff before they could use their leadership on those same initiatives.

Build Structures

Once principals had built relationships, they proceeded to put structures in place to support and to guide teachers’ work. They referred to the development of structures as the evolution of school culture. A prime example where principals used teacher leadership to relieve some of their workload was in instructional leadership. Principals identified their role as that of facilitator; they provided structures, time, and resources, so teachers could lead in their areas of expertise. Brian saw his role to “empower teachers to improve their instruction ... by providing them with resources, by providing them with

time for inservice” (P3, p. 3). None of the principals saw their role as being the instructional leader of the school; rather they negotiated this role to their teacher leaders.

The team or committee structure in many schools was another way for principals to direct teacher leadership efforts. Paul had just made the transition from administrators chairing school growth teams to teacher leadership, and he had to work initially to facilitate that change. Paul described:

The beginning of the year, I spent a lot of time with those people, getting those teams going and getting focused, and just deciding on direction and movement

Now we’re kind of rolling with things, so I can back off a bit on some of the extra time I was putting into that. (P2, p. 5)

Through teacher leadership, Paul was able to gain time for other work. Paul also provided class coverage to his teachers to allow time for team planning. While it took Annie 2 years to change the structure of staff meetings, in terms of her role, “staff meetings are a nonissue for me anymore because my staff do them” (P6, p. 16). The team or committee structure was also used to share the responsibility of decision-making.

Model and Mentor

Many of the informal tasks principals did as part of their daily routine could be categorized either as a modelling or as a mentoring activity. In his first year at a new school, Alan felt it was a priority to set the stage for the years to come. He did this through modelling, in that “a lot of the leadership is behind the scenes. It’s not up on the stage, rah, rah; it’s just day in, day out actions and conversations with people” (P1, p. 4). When asked how he changed poor habits that were deeply entrenched, he responded, “repetition, a lot of it. Being out and doing it, and walking it, and how we’re going to

treat people, and the way that we talk to the kids, the way we talk and solve problems among the adults” (P1, p. 9). Pam put a priority on “being a role model for my teachers, and we all say we walk the talk, but not a lot of us do” (P5, p. 4). For her, “this is where I should be. I should be in the classrooms, I should be talking to teachers, I should be assisting and helping” (P5, p. 4). Other principals modelled being a learner through informal sharing of their own professional development and simply through attitude and behavior in the school building. They identified modelling as a highly effective way not only to build relationships but also to effect change in the roles of others.

Mentoring was another method used to change staff and to facilitate growth. The prime candidate for mentoring was the administrative partner. In negotiating her work roles, Kim would “delegate almost anything to my vice-principal ... because he is an individual I’m working with to mentor him in the administrative role, so as often as possible I do try to delegate things to him” (P4, p. 10). The principals used the role of the vice-principal to gain time for other higher priority tasks. The disadvantage was that mentoring itself took time. As Paul described, “not having a V.P. has slowed me down in terms of all the stuff that that person would do that I have to do now, but at the same time, I’m gaining time around some decision-making, some consultation” (P2, p. 6). The principals in single administrator schools certainly felt that having another administrator would be an advantage.

The vice-principals were not the only staff to mentor. Through mentoring, principals were able to groom teachers to take on leadership roles that would otherwise fall to an administrator. Brian’s goal was to put structures in place “so that staff members feel empowered to make decisions for the school” (P3, p. 2). Most principals saw

decision-making as a process in which they wished to involve staff. The difference among principals was the issues they chose to bring to staff and those they reserved for the office. Paul had just finished having this discussion with his staff. As part of their staff meeting, they had a roundtable discussion of “what things should the principal be deciding, what things should be left to staff, and what things should be done collaboratively” (P2, p. 3). In the end, “it was a good discussion, not any definitive answers, but just good discussion” (P2, p. 3), which also contributed to staff growth. The principals mentored through a combination of pushing staff to take on greater and different responsibilities and supporting them in those endeavors.

In the short term, many of the principals’ activities around negotiating the roles of others took as much or more time than it would have to complete the tasks themselves. Building relationships, creating structures, and modelling and mentoring are all time-consuming enterprises. This short-term investment in others was expected to have resulted in long-term benefit for the principal, who could back away in future and let others run the projects they had undertaken. It was beyond the limits of these discussions to know if that was the result.

Negotiating the Self

The principals who were the most confident and comfortable in their position had a clear understanding not only of what the job entailed but also of who they were within the job. They knew that who they were as a person had a profound impact on the way they negotiated their work roles and capitalized on that rather than apologizing for it. These principals put a priority on their personal well-being in order to be more successful at their jobs.

Personality and Values

The way principals chose which roles to complete first (or better) and which to rush through or let slide came from their personalities. When asked directly how he prioritized and negotiated all the different demands of his job, Alan said, “a big part of it is what your strength is and what your personality happens to be” (P1, p. 20). Each principal had their own way of expressing the same thing: “Well, that’s me.” (P3, p. 3), “I’m just going to do it the way I feel is good” (P5, p. 13), or “How I go about doing that is a lot of who I am as a person” (P6, p. 2). Different principals did things differently as a result of their personalities, but Alan felt there was also a similarity of personality traits among principals:

There are big expectations there and part of it is just ourselves. I mean, to choose to do this you had some sort of idea that you’d be able to do it well ... and I think the common thing is that we all have this idea that we can help make schools be better places. We can help lead schools to be really good schools. (P1, p. 11)

Principals recognized that the way they did their jobs arose in large part from their personality.

What principals valued also affected the way they prioritized work roles. One of Pam’s first priorities was to support staff, but she also observed that,

if I have a teacher who doesn’t care about kids, because my bottom line is I’m here for the kids, and they don’t buy in and what we’re doing is good for kids, then my philosophy is then you shouldn’t be working with me. (P5, p. 5)

Her personal values overrode the support of any staff member who did not hold that value equally highly. When asked to explicitly describe how they prioritized their various

work roles, these principals found that they could not, or justified why that was an unanswerable question. Annie, however, found the answer in her values:

I believe you have to know what it is that's important to you and what's important for kids. You have to know who you are as a person, because probably that's never going to be challenged as much as when you're an administrator. Because you are the bottom line, and so if you don't know what drives your decision-making ... you're going to be questioned. So you have to be able to speak from the heart and from the brain. You have to know why that's important. (P6, p. 23)

Annie was notably confident in her role, which could have resulted from being in the same school for 5 years but could also have been a result of her strong sense of self.

Personal Well-Being

Four of the 6 principals studied made the point that they had to look after their own personal well-being in order to be better able to fulfill their work roles. Kim put it most clearly:

We really need to work on balancing our health and balancing our emotional well-being against our job. This is a job we could work at 24 hours a day, but we can't and still maintain a healthy perspective on every day ... We just have to be well ourselves, and that takes time. (P4, p. 14)

They all advocated the importance of humour and having fun as necessary to preserving that emotional health. Pam, the first-year principal who seemed to be under the most stress, was the one always rushing and did not mention taking care of herself. When trying to describe a typical day, she joked, "It's so hard when someone says what do you do. I know that I don't sit. I don't have lunch" (P5, p. 3). Even though the demands of the

job were great and the work was often too much for one person to complete, most of these principals had accepted that and were prepared to work in that atmosphere. "It's supposed to be fun. It's not supposed to kill you" (P1, p. 16) was Alan's advice for those considering the principalship as a career. Their own personal well-being was an important factor in how these principals approached the negotiation of their work roles.

These Ontario elementary school principals were required to negotiate their varied work roles on a daily basis to determine which items would take priority, what could be postponed or eliminated, what was required by outside agencies and for accountability, what could be delegated to others, and what they needed personally. No principal was exempt from having to make these types of decisions every day, value-based decisions that had a profound effect on their schools. In the following chapter, I discuss these findings in detail along with their implications for principals and schools.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

The complexities and tensions in contemporary school systems are well documented at the beginning of the 21st century, and few roles within the system are as complex as that of the elementary school principal. The elementary principal has arguably more control than any other single party over the practices and procedures that influence the environment and the way in which children will learn. Ministry and school board initiatives, parent council and community input, and teacher practice all fall under the responsibility of principals to implement as they see fit. As principals are required to make multiple value-laden judgements each day in the course of their work, it is essential to investigate how principals make these decisions. How do they negotiate the varied work roles they are required to play?

Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study, therefore, was to investigate how Ontario elementary school principals experience their work and how they negotiate their varied work roles. In order to address this purpose, I conducted a qualitative research study of 6 principals in one public school board in Ontario. The participants were solicited through a combination of purposive sampling using internal e-mail and a snowball technique. During an interview, I asked open-ended questions related to the principals' daily work and how they made those difficult decisions regarding what tasks became a priority and which were deemed less important or ignored. Through a half-day observation of each principal in his or her school, I was able to see firsthand what a principal's day is like and to witness the competing demands on their time and energies. Methods of data collection

included audiotaping of interviews, a detailed research log, and fieldnotes taken during the observation portion of the study.

Data analysis was conducted through an inductive process that began during the transcribing of the interviews and continued through coding of data in search of common themes or notable exceptions both within and among participants. At the conclusion of this process, I arrived at five themes describing a principal's varied negotiations: negotiation of priorities, negotiation of the process, negotiation of constraints, negotiation of the roles of others, and negotiation of the self.

Within the negotiation of priorities, these principals found the nature of priorities falling into three categories: long-term priorities, short-term needs, and being immediately available to people in the building. They then had to order these priorities and manage the daily tensions that arose from this balancing act. The process of negotiation varied according to the principals' administrative experience and how many years they had been in that particular school. A major strategy for successful management of the process of negotiation required the principal to exercise discretion in decision-making and not get themselves or their schools involved in too many things at once. Constraints that these principals had to consider included a trend toward greater accountability in many areas and the specific requirements of the individual schools and communities. Building relationships, building structures, and modelling and mentoring were the three main ways that these principals negotiated the roles of others in their schools. The last area of negotiation was the self. A principal's personality and values as well as concern for personal well-being largely influenced the way that individual negotiated demands on time and energy and performed the job.

Discussion

For the principals in this study, time spent with people was their first priority. The people most often mentioned included students, teachers, parents, and administrative partners. There were select times when they chose to close their doors and be unavailable, but this was rare. More often, paperwork and managerial tasks were left to after-school hours, at home, or on weekends. Trying to complete managerial tasks during the day was an exercise in futility because of the number of interruptions that are an expected part of the principal's work. While they expressed frustration with not being able to accomplish as great a number of things in a day as they might wish, these principals recognized that it was worth the sacrifice to maximize time with people.

This investment in time results in building relationships, which then improves the affective climate within the school. This confirms the results of Mitchell and Castle (2002), who found that the principals in their study placed the most emphasis on building relationships in their schools, thereby building an affective climate. In their analysis of the instructional role of elementary school principals, they discovered that principals use informal daily dialogue with teachers and praise and encouragement with teachers and students as two main strategies. These informal interactions can happen only when principals put a priority on being available.

This is a style that the 6 participants in my study seemed to embrace, due in large part I believe, to their personalities and general outgoing natures. If this was not a principal's natural inclination, it would require a great deal of effort to facilitate these sorts of informal interactions that seem to come so easily to others, especially when this results in a highly fragmented task environment. The value of these informal interactions

to instructional leadership and to positive school culture cannot be denied, but neither can these activities alone constitute instructional leadership.

When asked directly about their role in instructional leadership, not one of the principals in this study classified themselves as the instructional leader of their school. They saw their role rather as a facilitator who could provide structures, time, and resources, to enable the leadership of others. So, while they are engaging in some forms of instructional leadership activities, the question remains whether their actions are sufficient to maintain a high quality of instruction in their schools.

Mitchell and Castle (2002) conclude that “instructional leadership remains one of the more neglected aspects of school principals’ work” (p. 24), while at the same time acknowledging that there is no precise definition of the concept of instructional leadership. While much of what these principals do on a daily basis could be classified under the heading instructional leadership, it is troubling that they do not identify themselves as instructional leaders. Mitchell and Castle found that “the degree to which principals place a personal priority on teaching and learning sends a clear message about the importance of teaching and learning in the school” (p. 24). Principals who choose to quietly facilitate the instructional leadership of others may inadvertently be seen as not placing a priority on what occurs in classrooms.

Another common way for these principals to employ teacher leadership was through the team or committee structure for decision-making. In some schools, teacher committees, chaired by teachers, determined yearly school-effectiveness plans, with seemingly little administrative involvement. While teachers are willing and certainly, in

most cases, capable of taking on this responsibility, principals cannot ignore their influence in determining what the teachers in their schools will treat as important.

With regard to the process of negotiation, the more often a principal moves schools, the more difficult the process of negotiation becomes. The process with which these principals began in new schools was not the same, but each acknowledged that starting in a new school required something different. For some, the process involved watching, listening, and waiting to implement changes, whereas for others, it meant making sweeping changes right from the start. Regardless of the preferred approach, the responsibilities of the principal were more challenging in a new school. The school- and community-specific constraints were different, and principals had to rebuild those all-important relationships that facilitate trust and build a positive school culture.

Sarbit (2002) follows the succession experiences of two principals, concluding that principal succession is extremely complex and can be very difficult, both personally and professionally. She poses what I believe to be two critical questions concerning the succession of principals: "Should principal succession be a frequent practice in school districts?" and "Who should decide when the time is right for a principal to be moved?" (p. 95). Currently, in the school board I studied, much of the control over a principal's move to a new school is held at the board office, with limited input from principals and school councils. Frequent moves that do not consider the wishes of the principal, staff, and school community can only have a negative effect on how the principal is able to negotiate the demands of the job.

Finally, a large part of how principals negotiate their varied work roles comes from who the principal is and what he or she personally values. Much of the negotiation

these principals did occurred through experience or by instinct, in an ad hoc fashion. They just did things the way they felt was right or in a way that suited their particular personality. In Parker J. Palmer's (1998) book, *The Courage to Teach*, the first heading in his introduction is "We Teach Who We Are" (p. 1). He goes on to explain that "teaching, like any truly human activity, emerges from one's inwardness, for better or worse" (p. 2). I would argue in the same fashion that these principals lead who they are. In this study, Annie talked of the importance of knowing yourself and what matters to you before you can be an effective principal and make those difficult decisions. In his own words, this is Palmer's thesis: "'Who is the self that teaches?' is the question at the heart of this book" (p. 7). This is perhaps the most striking conclusion in this study, with the greatest implications for principal recruitment and training.

Implications

The implications of this research study fall under two categories, the first being implications for practice. These are recommendations for what could be done differently in schools to enable principals to more effectively negotiate the demands of their varied roles. The second heading is implications for research. Due to the small scope of this study, there are limitations to the conclusions drawn and the ability to apply these conclusions to principals in general. This section highlights compelling issues that could serve as topics for future research.

Implications for Practice

The issue of moving principals between schools is a much-debated topic that seems to generate little consensus. The normal turnaround time in the board studied ranged between 3 and 5 years, but 2 of the participants in the study talked of moving in 2

years. For vice-principals, the timeline can be even shorter. Knowing that moving to a new school makes a principal's task of negotiation more difficult, these timelines should be extended to allow principals to develop trust relationships and a positive culture and then work to make systemic instructional changes within the affective climate that has been developed. Gardner (1990) calls it "institutionalizing leadership" (p. 12), explaining that "if [leaders] fail to institutionalize the process, their departure leaves the system crippled. They must create or strengthen systems that will survive them" (p. 12). One of my participants, Alan, would like to see spending 5 to 7 years in one school before moving and spoke of research he had seen in the United States where the principals of some high schools can be in one place for up to 16 years (P1, p. 11). Change is often positive, and too much time in one school can lead to stagnation for the administrators and the staff, but there has to be a balance that recognizes the challenges involved in principal succession.

Principal training programs need to take into account that principals must negotiate the varied demands of their job and explicitly teach strategies for managing these choices and challenges. The principals in this study made many of their choices based on what felt right or on previous experiences. Some had a network of colleagues that they could call on for advice. Explicit instruction in negotiation techniques by experienced administrators would give candidates a head start on the learning curve. A formal mentorship system would help those principals who are new to a school board to make contacts that could take a long time to develop otherwise. The other thing these programs need to stress to administrative candidates is the fragmented nature of the work. This seems to be an unavoidable part of the job, so principals need to learn from the start

how to manage in this environment. Candidates who cannot learn to function with constant change, surprises, and interruptions are probably not suitable for the job.

Principal recruitment policies need to recognize that a large part of educational administration and how principals negotiate their varied work roles comes from their personality and their personal values. Therefore, the values that the society endorses and wishes to communicate through the educational system need to be exemplified in educational leaders. If we believe in the importance of a moral approach to education and teaching children to be empathetic, caring members of a community, then we need leaders who believe in creating that community in schools. If we hold teaching and learning as primary goals, then leaders need to understand the elements required to achieve good teaching practice. As a result, I maintain that educational administrators must come from a teaching background which at the very least engenders an understanding of the classroom and the challenges involved.

Implications for Research

One of the major frustrations expressed by these principals was the difficulty in balancing leadership activities with managerial tasks while remaining available and fighting those fires that are sure to arise. Not one had found a way to effectively manage this tension and relieve the stress that it caused on a daily basis. The principals I studied would welcome the answer to this question, or at least recommendations as to the most effective way to approach the situation.

These principals put a large amount of time into negotiating the roles of others through building relationships, building structures, and modelling and mentoring. This is a significant initial investment of time, anticipating that the leadership of others will save

time and build organizational capacity over the long term. How are principals best to develop the roles of others, which is one thing that will serve to institutionalize their leadership after they have moved on? Current research into the development of learning communities may provide the answers to this question.

This study was primarily limited in its scope. Six elementary principals from one southern Ontario school board provide only a quick glimpse into the experiences of principals throughout Ontario and other parts of Canada. This does not diminish the importance or significance of their experiences but leaves the opportunity for further research involving a larger, more varied population to seek to confirm, refute, or extend the findings of this study.

Final Thoughts

The nature of principals' work requires that they make daily choices regarding the negotiation of their varied work roles. These choices are necessarily moral choices, as they involve prioritizing some people and areas and leaving others. This process of negotiation is not straightforward or simple and cannot be learned in a book, through a manual, or from a course. Part of the way these principals negotiate comes from their own experience and the experiences of others, and part of it arises from who they are and what they value. What these principals valued first was time spent with people in the school building: teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community. They made interpersonal relationships a priority at the expense of administrative tasks and other paperwork, even when it meant sacrificing their personal and family time to do so. If this is the case in a majority of elementary schools, then students are seeing firsthand a demonstration of the value of learning in community.

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Appendix A

List of Interview Questions

1. Briefly, can you give me some background on your career as a principal?
2. During the course of your day what are some of the major roles you are required to play? (e.g., instructional leader, disciplinarian, community liaison)
3. List these roles in order of importance and explain why you believe one to be of greater importance than another?
4. How do you determine how much time is allocated in any given day to each of the above roles, and which roles generally occupy the majority of your time?
5. How do you approach issues of power and decision-making within your school?
6. Do you see yourself as an instructional leader, and what are your practices regarding instructional leadership within your school?
7. How do you approach managerial tasks within your school?
8. Do you, your staff, and your school set goals and objectives formally or informally, and how is this done? What is the process, if any, for review and revision?
9. How do you see your current school climate and staff relationships, and how do you personally have an effect in this area?
10. Which parts of your work do you feel are most appropriate for delegation to others and which do you feel must remain the full responsibility of the principal?
11. How do you feel that your work as a principal has changed, how do you see it changing in the future, and what changes would you like to see?

12. What advice would you give to others?

Appendix B

Researcher Guideline for Observation

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Principal's Work | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- what is the principal doing? -- where does the work take place? -- how much time is being allotted to this task? -- which role category could this fall under?** -- was this planned or unplanned work at this time? |
| Principal's Interactions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- what is the content and the nature of the interaction? -- who is the principal interacting with? -- how long is given to the interaction? -- which role category could this fall under?** -- was this a planned or unplanned interaction? -- who initiated the interaction? |

**watch for evidence of new or different role categories than those previously listed

Examples of Power and Decision-making Examples of Instructional Leadership

Examples of Managerial Tasks

Examples of Development or Implementation of Goals or Objectives

Examples of Development of School Climate or Staff Relations

Examples of Actions that seem Incongruous with the Participant Interview Data

Possible Questions for Observation Follow-Up

1. Was this a typical day?
2. If not, when would [a certain activity] be more likely to happen?

3. What work were you involved in at this point (explanation of paper work or invisible tasks)?
4. Would you describe today as a good day? Explain.
5. Is there anything else you would like me to know before we finish?

Appendix C

Ethics Approvals

Senate Research Ethics Board Extensions 3943/3035, Room AS 302

DATE: October 22, 2003

FROM: Joe Engemann, Chair

Senate Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Coral Mitchell, Education

Terri Convey

FILE: 03-044 Convey

TITLE: How Ontario Elementary School Principals Negotiate their Varied Work Roles

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as Clarified

This project has been approved for the period of **October 22, 2003 to August 30, 2004** subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting.

The approval may be extended upon request. *The study may now proceed.*

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and approved by the REB. The Board must approve any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to www.BrockU.CA/researchservices/forms.html to complete the appropriate form **REB-03 (2001) Request for Clearance of a Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application**.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and approvals of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects, with the exception of undergraduate projects, upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form **REB-02 (2001) Continuing Review/Final Report** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

Deborah VanOosten, Research Ethics Officer

Brock University

Office of Research Services

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<http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/humanethics.html>



Halton District School Board

D.L. Papke, Ed.D., *Director of Education*

E. Gardiner, *Chair of the Board*

Terri Convey
733 Coulson Ave.
Milton, Ontario
L9T 4J3

September 18, 2003

Dear Terri:

The Research Advisory Committee has approved your request to conduct research in the Halton District School Board. The study entitled "*How Ontario elementary school principals negotiate their varied work roles*" was found to be legally, morally, technically and ethically sound.

We look forward to receiving a summary of your findings in the summer of 2004. On behalf of the Research Advisory Committee, I wish you great success in this endeavor.

Yours truly,

Heather Gataveckas
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